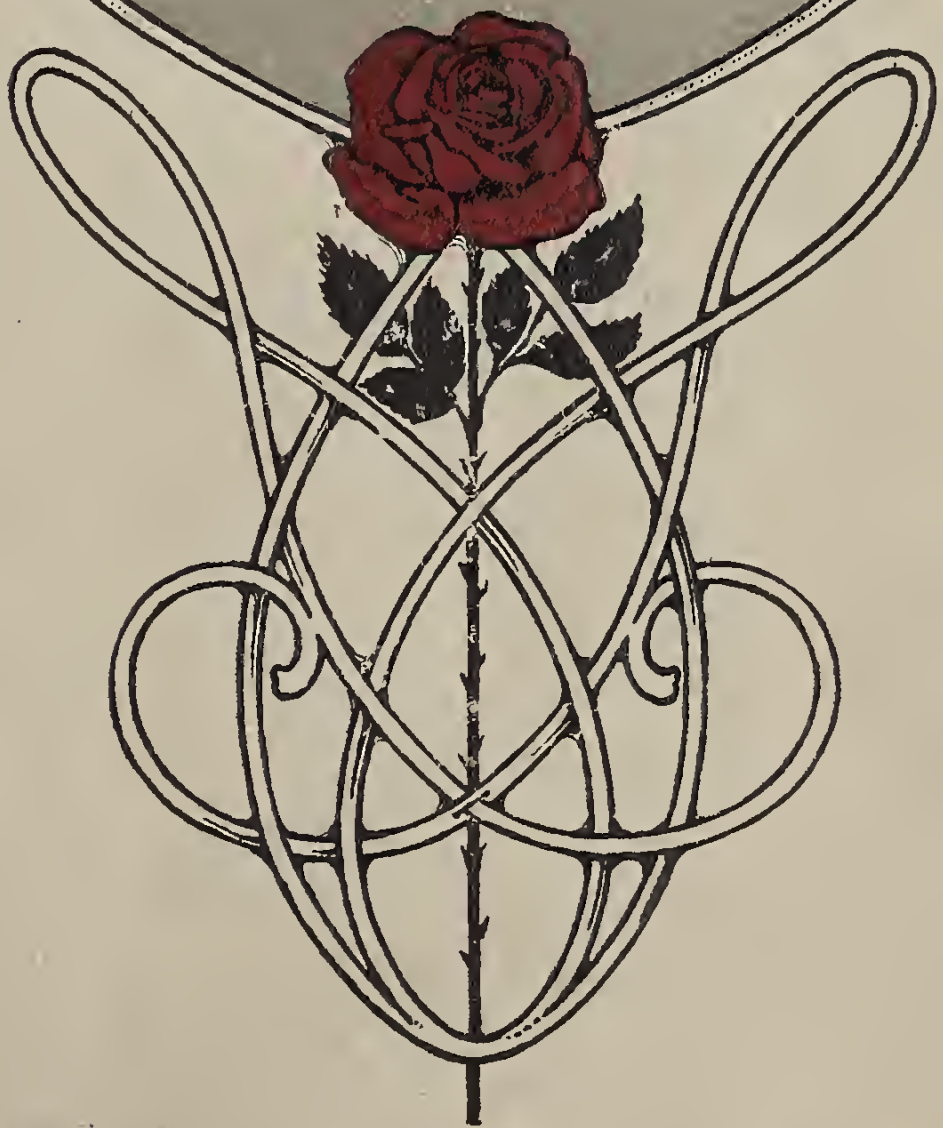
Manager Woods' Happy Burnt-District Home



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Hotel St. Francis, San Francisco,
In the center of the city's life and color

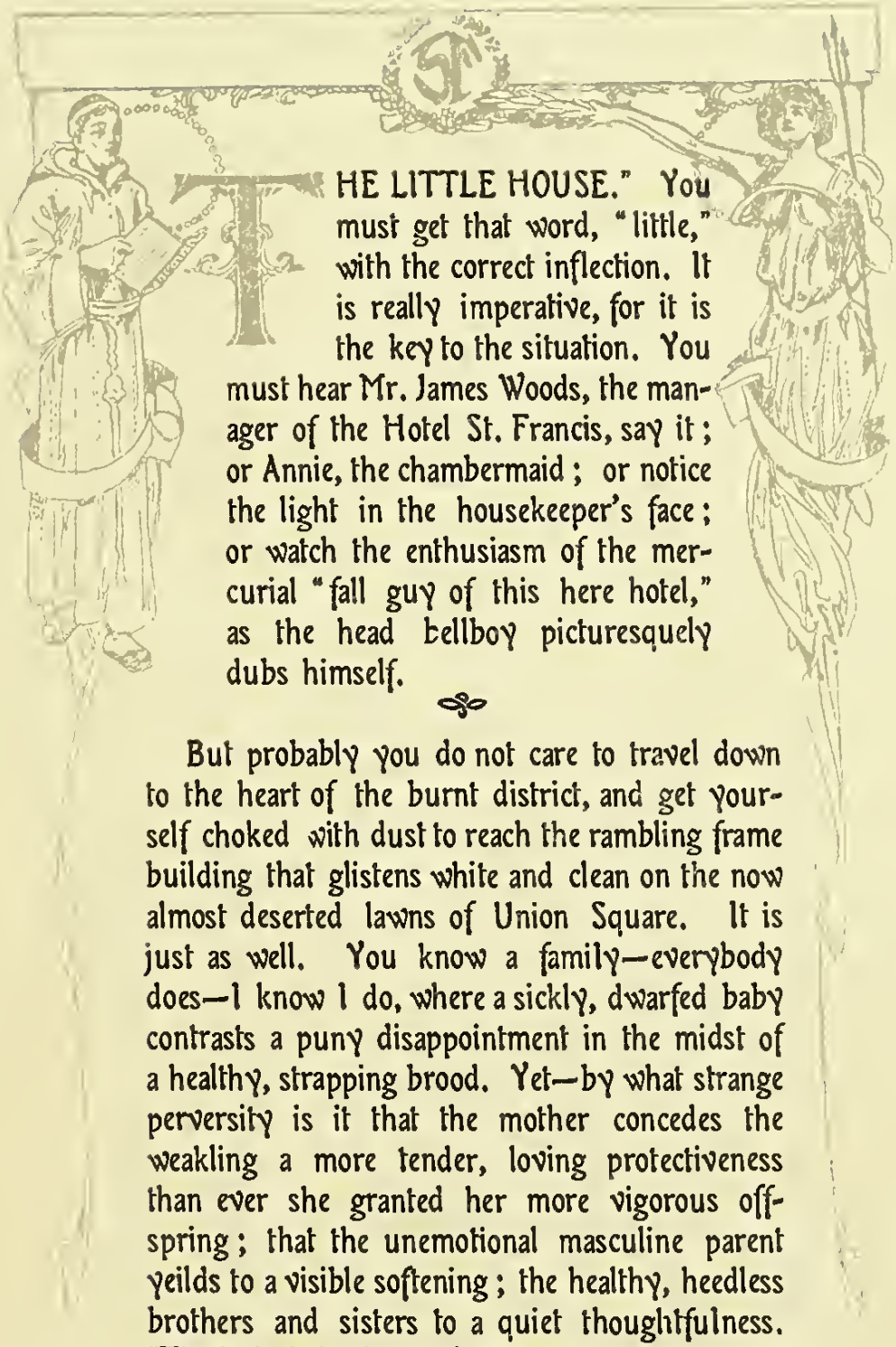
Manager Woods' Happy Burnt-District Home

By Pauline Jacobson

San Francisco
Privately Printed
1912

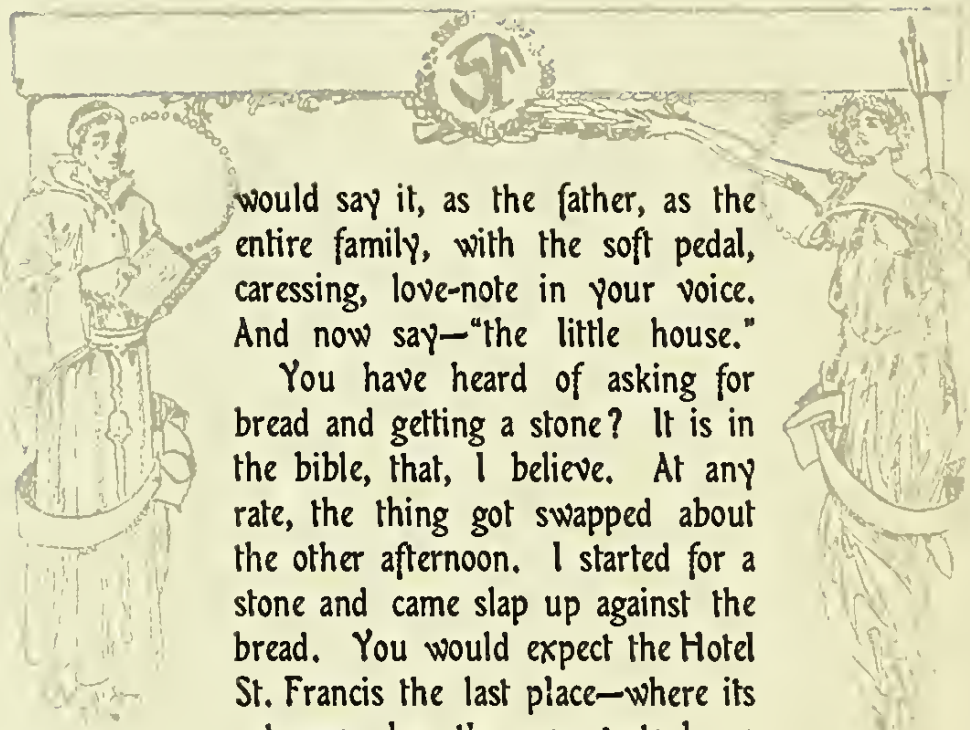
EXPLANATORY

This article was originally printed in the San Francisco Bulletin of October 28th, 1906; and is descriptive of the temporary Hotel St. Francis, erected on the lawns of Union Square pending the rebuilding of the main hotel; and for months the only first-class caravansary in the entire burnt district.



"THE LITTLE HOUSE." You must get that word, "little," with the correct inflection. It is really imperative, for it is the key to the situation. You must hear Mr. James Woods, the manager of the Hotel St. Francis, say it; or Annie, the chambermaid; or notice the light in the housekeeper's face; or watch the enthusiasm of the mercurial "fall guy of this here hotel," as the head bellboy picturesquely dubs himself.

But probably you do not care to travel down to the heart of the burnt district, and get yourself choked with dust to reach the rambling frame building that glistens white and clean on the now almost deserted lawns of Union Square. It is just as well. You know a family—everybody does—I know I do, where a sickly, dwarfed baby contrasts a puny disappointment in the midst of a healthy, strapping brood. Yet—by what strange perversity is it that the mother concedes the weakling a more tender, loving protectiveness than ever she granted her more vigorous offspring; that the unemotional masculine parent yeilds to a visible softening; the healthy, heedless brothers and sisters to a quiet thoughtfulness. "The little baby"—that's it, say it as the mother



would say it, as the father, as the entire family, with the soft pedal, caressing, love-note in your voice. And now say—"the little house."

You have heard of asking for bread and getting a stone? It is in the bible, that, I believe. At any rate, the thing got swapped about the other afternoon. I started for a stone and came slap up against the bread. You would expect the Hotel St. Francis the last place—where its patronage has the money—to be as selfish and mean and cantankerous as it likes. It is the bread of April eighteenth that one finds; of the nineteenth; of the twentieth; of the three or more weeks following; not the horse fodder stuff of the soldiers, nor the loaves of the bread line, but the millennium bread you and I and everyone ate when we were all millennium tramps together. It is rare, that bread, that was so plentiful those days.

It was Annie, the chambermaid, who threw the most light on the situation. She was cleaning a room, so we stood out in the hall and talked.

"Complaints," reiterated Annie. Annie has spit-fire, snapping brown Irish eyes, but they forgot to spit fire. She looked at me hurt and surprised like. "Ah, no, not at the little doll's

house," she crooned. "We all love the little house."

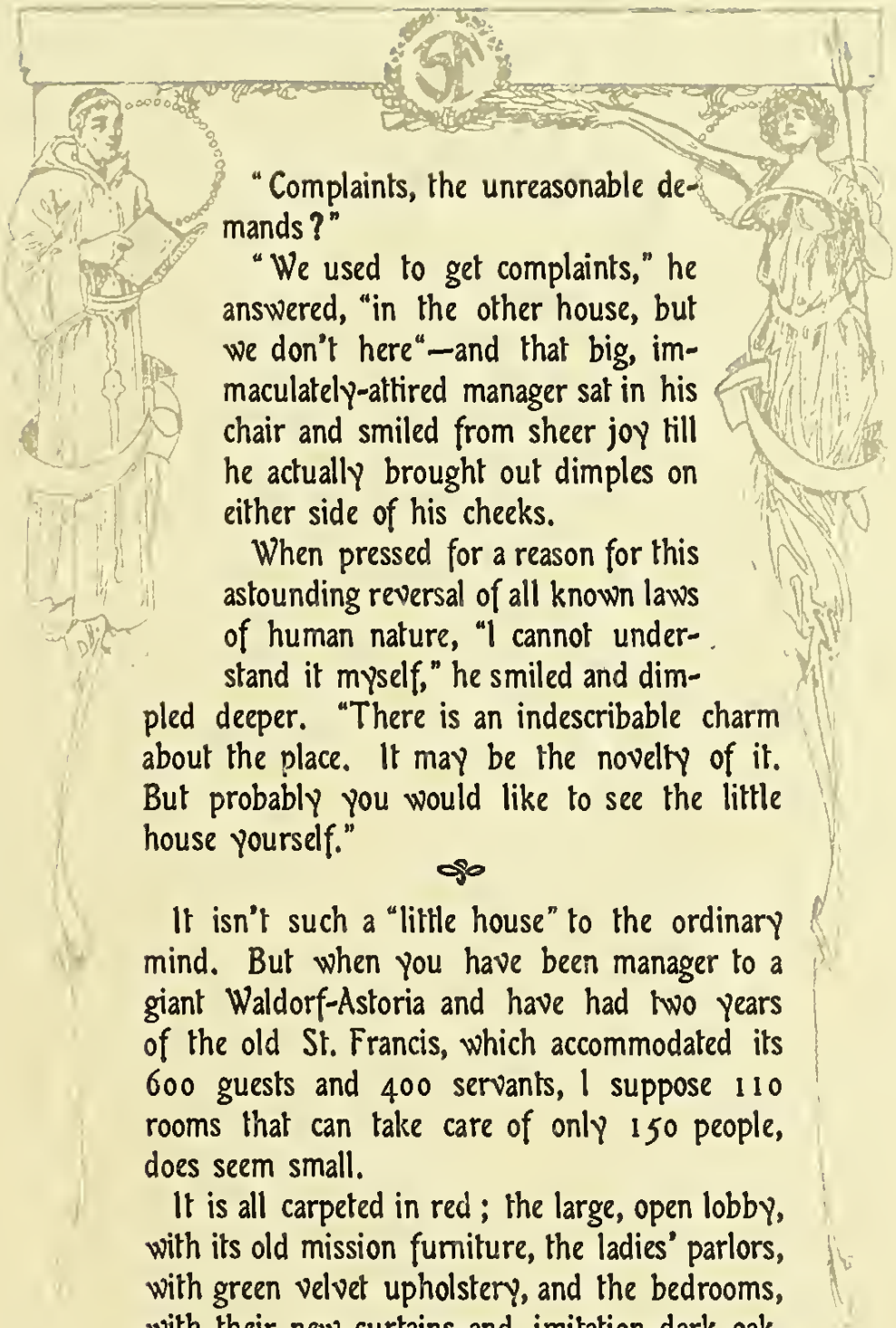
"But the rooms are small," I said for augument's sake, poking my nose into a good-sized west room.

"Ah," exclaimed Annie, in the same crooning, hurt voice, "but they are such cunning little rooms."

It was to the St. Francis I had been ordered to hunt up Mr. Woods, the manager, to inquire of the vexation of spirit in his attempt to run a first-class hotel in the makeshift of the ruins; of the unreasonable demands of the ladies. (You might know a man gave that order.)

It was of a harassed, dyspeptic looking manager that I conjured a vision, with woe-begone, tired, downward lines to the mouth; of ennuied bellboys; of haughty, overbearing clerks and impudent waiters. Imagine my surprise, then, when I found the place fairly spilling over with cheerfulness, from the well-curried, well-fed cheerful guest, lounging in the lobby, to the janitor, in checked jumpers, washing the windows. As for the manager, not a line was to be seen in his plump, young, smooth-shaven face, save some little smiling lines in the corners of his wide, grey-blue eyes.

"Comes along with the fight all in her."



"Complaints, the unreasonable demands?"

"We used to get complaints," he answered, "in the other house, but we don't here"—and that big, immaculately-attired manager sat in his chair and smiled from sheer joy till he actually brought out dimples on either side of his cheeks.

When pressed for a reason for this astounding reversal of all known laws of human nature, "I cannot understand it myself," he smiled and dimpled deeper. "There is an indescribable charm about the place. It may be the novelty of it. But probably you would like to see the little house yourself."

It isn't such a "little house" to the ordinary mind. But when you have been manager to a giant Waldorf-Astoria and have had two years of the old St. Francis, which accommodated its 600 guests and 400 servants, I suppose 110 rooms that can take care of only 150 people, does seem small.

It is all carpeted in red; the large, open lobby, with its old mission furniture, the ladies' parlors, with green velvet upholstery, and the bedrooms, with their new curtains and imitation dark oak.

"These," said Mr. Woods, indicating the furniture, "will be put under the auctioneer's hammer

when we are through. All save the beds. We shall move them across the way. They are the best that money can buy."

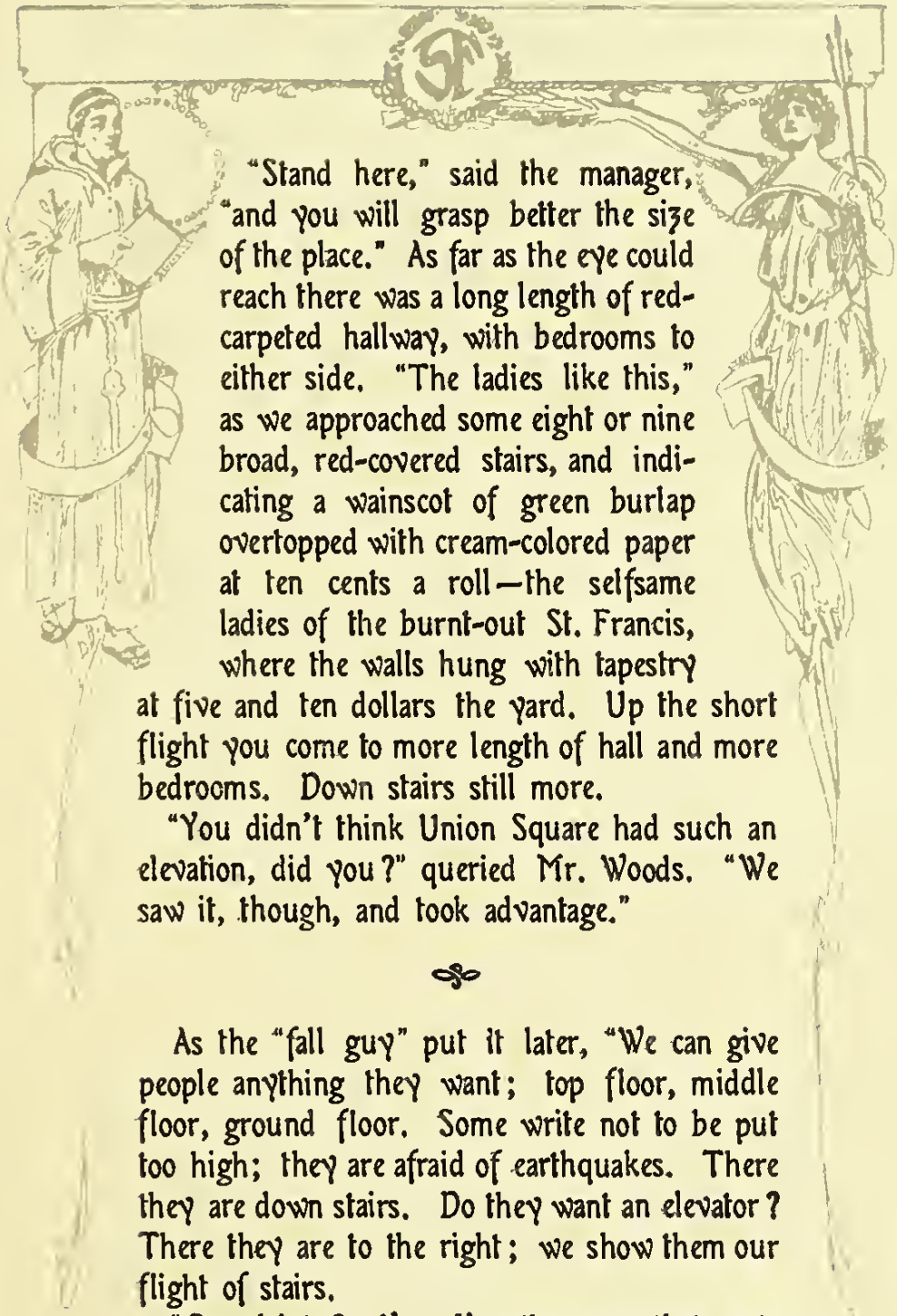
The bedsteads are of massive dull-finished brass. He turned back the bedding. The mattresses are a dream of sleeping luxury; the finest of box with a foot thick of the best of hair top

"Give a guest a good bed and a good cup of coffee, and you have him half won."

Wise manager. "Three-fourths," I amended. "And you make more money. If the coffee is poor I eat all day chasing up the right bite."

"Exactly forty-five days from the day we broke ground we opened this hotel," continued Mr. Woods. "But I don't take any credit to myself. It is due to the builders and the merchants who came to my assistance."

Forty-five days! To clear away mountainous debris; to build and furnish; to paint and paper; to electric light; to fit with plentiful public baths; to insert individual telephones; to install a barber shop; to put in a printing plant doing credit to a Roycrofter; to stock a linen room to the ceiling; to set in full swing a grill room, glistening in all its old-time damask and cut-glass and silver, and savory of all its old-time cookery.

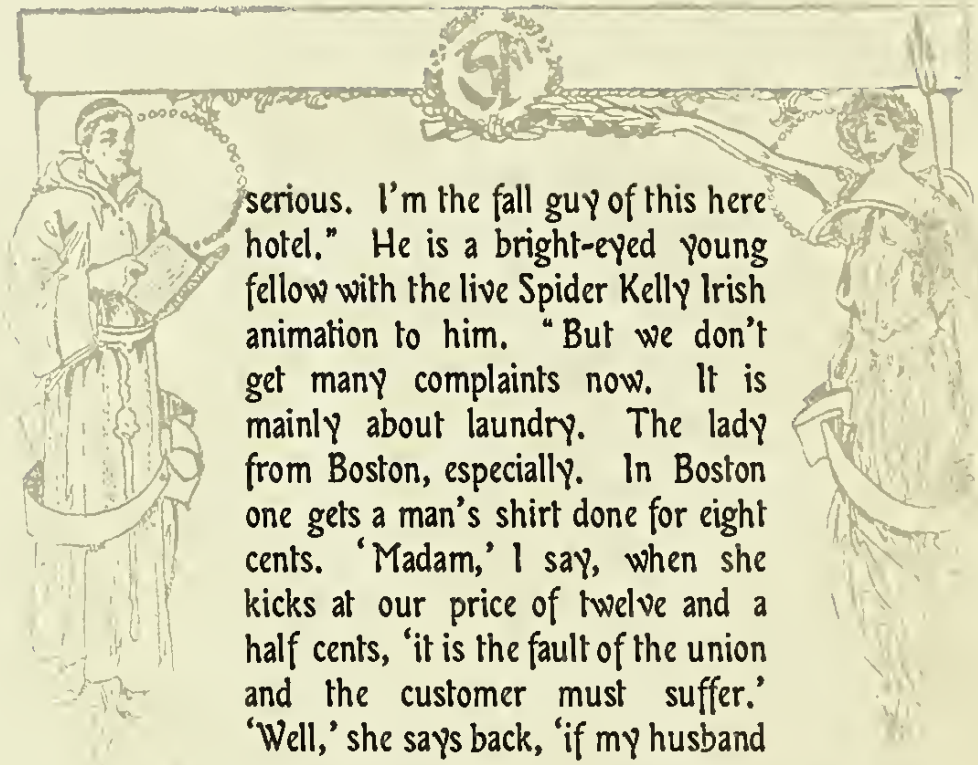


"Stand here," said the manager, "and you will grasp better the size of the place." As far as the eye could reach there was a long length of red-carpeted hallway, with bedrooms to either side. "The ladies like this," as we approached some eight or nine broad, red-covered stairs, and indicating a wainscot of green burlap overtopped with cream-colored paper at ten cents a roll—the selfsame ladies of the burnt-out St. Francis, where the walls hung with tapestry at five and ten dollars the yard. Up the short flight you come to more length of hall and more bedrooms. Down stairs still more.

"You didn't think Union Square had such an elevation, did you?" queried Mr. Woods. "We saw it, though, and took advantage."

As the "fall guy" put it later, "We can give people anything they want; top floor, middle floor, ground floor. Some write not to be put too high; they are afraid of earthquakes. There they are down stairs. Do they want an elevator? There they are to the right; we show them our flight of stairs.

"Complaints? Yes, I'm the man that gets most of them. Mr. Woods hears only the very



serious. I'm the fall guy of this here hotel." He is a bright-eyed young fellow with the live Spider Kelly Irish animation to him. "But we don't get many complaints now. It is mainly about laundry. The lady from Boston, especially. In Boston one gets a man's shirt done for eight cents. 'Madam,' I say, when she kicks at our price of twelve and a half cents, 'it is the fault of the union and the customer must suffer.' 'Well,' she says back, 'if my husband lived in San Francisco there wouldn't by any unions.' And there you are," and the little fall guy let his hands drop helplessly while he looked at the artist as if to say, "Isn't that just like a woman?"

"Why don't we have as many complaints?" he went on. "Well, there is the elevator. We haven't that to contend with now. In the other house we had three elevators going all the time, one down, the other at top, the third in between. Before you started your car up you had to look if the top car had started down. Probably the boy was being delayed by two ladies finishing their conversation. You can't slam the door and go on. In a first-class hotel it would mean your job would go, too. Then your passenger downstairs pitches into you. 'Why don't you start? Do you think I can wait here all the evening!'

"They seem grateful for everything you do for them."

Next day three or four people come to give you directions how to operate those three cars.

"At first there were a good many complaints about the floor shaking. The place is built light and every heavy tread could be felt throughout the entire house. The guests would come running into the office, wanting to know if it wasn't an earthquake. We all go around with rubber heels now, so that is fixed all right.

"Complaints about the accommodations? Oh, NO! Everyone is tickled with the place; even the skilled flaw pickers. Some ladies are scientific flaw pickers. You might go into a room and find it grand. One of these ladies might go right in behind you and find more flaws than a pawnbroker when you put your furniture in hock. But we have astounded them. It is like a prize-fighter. Give him a good body blow and he forgets all his science. Outside it looks like a cheap country shack. The flaw-picker comes along with the fight all in her. She gets to the bedroom. It takes her breath away and she forgets all her science. Everything is new and clean, and the beds are very nice. Then she meets the same maid, the same head waiter, the same chef, the same orchestra plays at dinner and at night, and

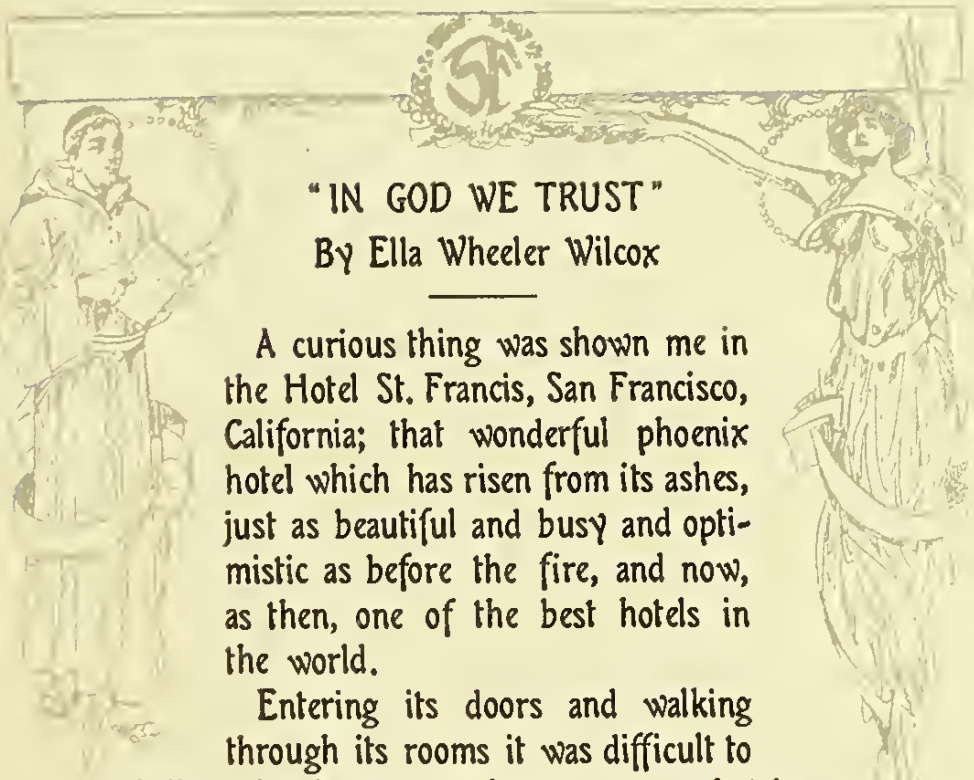
the rates are the same. Up-town the prices are higher. They have to make hay while the sun shines. So, when she pays her bill she goes away pleased. The highest price anyone can pay for two persons is five dollars, and for one, two fifty. That gets the ladies, especially. You should see the way they look when they get their bill. They look down at it, and then furtively around at you. Some go off to the car without saying a word. But occasionally we have someone come back to ask if we didn't forget to charge for a day or two. The people are very easily handled these days. This fire has woke us up, and it has woke up the traveling public. Then, too, it is like a funeral—in the ruins all the time—so they warm up to you more. You look awfully good to them; like some lost relative they haven't seen in a long while. And they seem grateful for everything you do for them."

"Each day," said Mr. Woods, "we turn more people away than we can accommodate. It has been a pleasure from the very start; the results have been so quick and satisfactory; the guests so delighted; this little organization of help running along so smoothly. It has been perfect, plain sailing from the beginning. In fact, the little house is the pleasantest sailing I have had in many a day."

"FRANCIS"

This little fox terrier is the only known animal to live and pass through the ordeal of fire in the burnt district of San Francisco. Owned by the wine steward of the Hotel St. Francis, and having her home in the cellars, she lived through the sea of flame amid the exploding wine bottles, and was found weak but agressive, five days after in the debris of the department, valiantly guarding the remains of the stock.

She is now the mascot of the hotel, petted and pampered by guests and employees alike.



"IN GOD WE TRUST"

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

A curious thing was shown me in the Hotel St. Francis, San Francisco, California; that wonderful phoenix hotel which has risen from its ashes, just as beautiful and busy and optimistic as before the fire, and now, as then, one of the best hotels in the world.

Entering its doors and walking through its rooms it was difficult to believe that it was not the very same hotel we had known two years ago. Yet it was burned out and all rebuilt.

At the desk they show you a twenty dollar gold piece which was found under burnt bricks, in the debris of the office, after the work of clearing out began. The face of Liberty is burned away; so are the wings of the eagle, but clear and bright remain the words: "In God We Trust."

And surely nowhere in the whole world, and never in the annals of history, can be found a greater proof of a trust in the "Divinity within" than has been, and is being exhibited by the people of San Francisco.

There are no melancholy faces in San Francisco. There is no talk of hard luck and misfortune.

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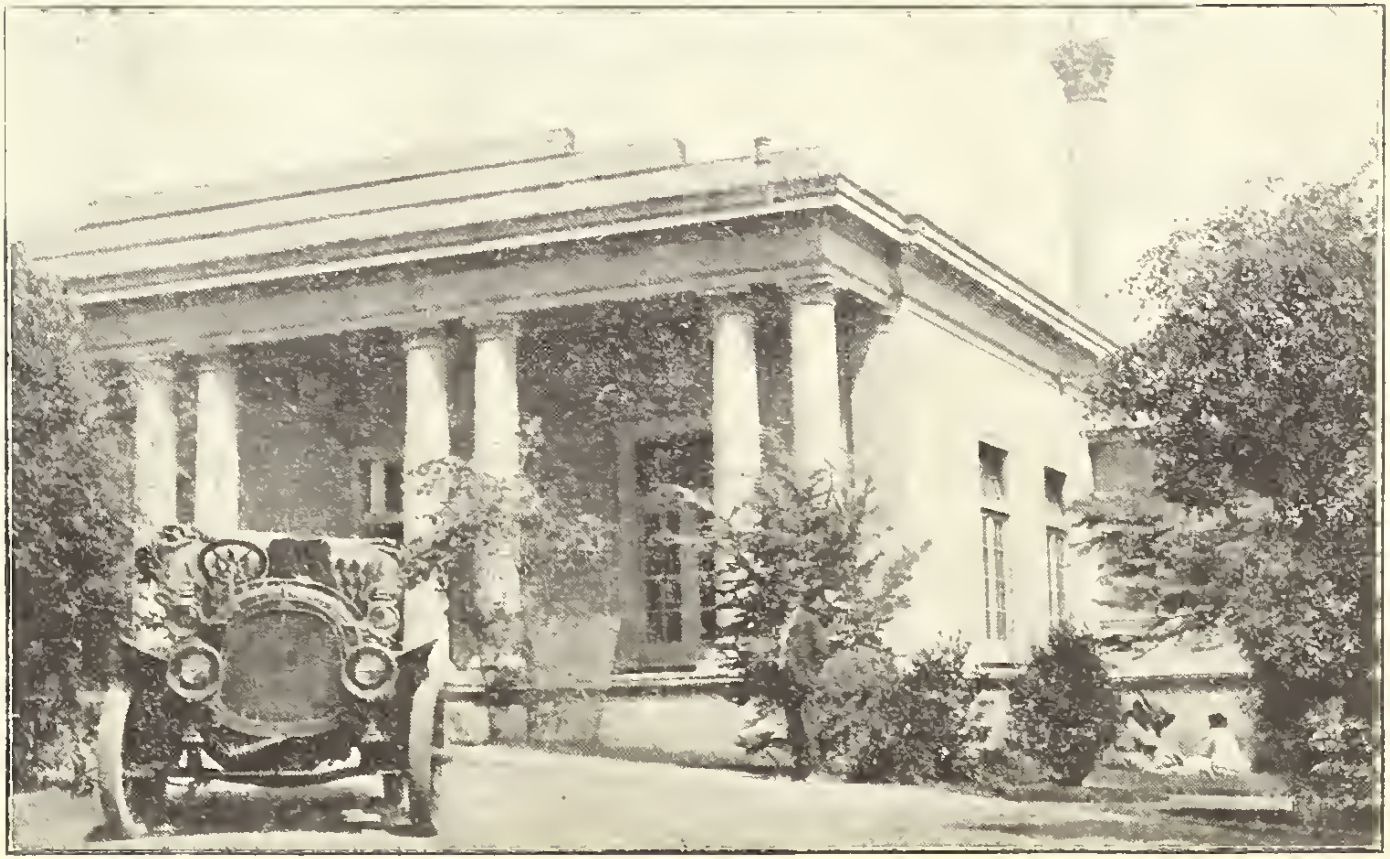
by Geo. F. Rowell



The Little House, Union Square, 1906